

ing to utilize wiregrass regrowth. The cattle must be removed in six to eight weeks to insure the establishment of creeping bluestem and other preferred grasses. The premise of this approach is that wiregrass will regrow earlier and faster than creeping bluestem and can therefore be grazed for several weeks after burning without a significant reduction of creeping bluestem establishment. This heavy seasonal use of wiregrass followed by a grazing deferment until fall has been shown to enhance creeping bluestem production.

On all native range operations, rotational grazing should be practiced throughout the year. A minimum of three pastures is suggested. One entire pasture could be burned each year and each pasture would be burned every three years. It is important to burn entire pastures, otherwise cattle will overgraze the burn areas. Since June, July, and August are the most detrimental months to graze creeping bluestem, a different pasture should be grazed each summer to maintain optimum yields. A six pasture rotation with a more rapid rotation allows for an early and late burn each year and extends the period of maximum forage quality during the winter.

In ranch operations with a combination of native and tame pasture, the native areas should be treated as previously described. Where cross fencing is adequate, the native range could be burned in March after the cattle have moved on to tame pastures. The herd could be returned for a light summer graze of the native range before the benefit of the burn diminishes. Another alternative would be to graze native range in the fall. This would allow forage accumulation on the vacated tame grass pastures for winter grazing. Fall grazing is especially advantageous on native rangelands where marshes and sloughs are common to insure the utilization of maidencane and blue maidencane before they die back from winter frost.

The burning of flatwoods may become infrequent as grazing management intensifies in the future. The manipulation of grazing may accomplish many of the objectives of burning. Grazing will initiate more nutritious and palatable regrowth and remove forage before it becomes rank. Grazing will remove excessive litter accumulations, which will increase productivity and encourage seeding. Grazing management will encourage healthier flatwood ranges, more resistant to brush encroachment and richer in species diversity. ●



Seminole Indian Ranching in Florida

Ed Sievers, Craig Tepper, and George W. Tanner

The Seminole Indian Tribe has traditionally raised cattle since the Spanish introduced cattle to Florida in the sixteenth century. Seminoles were first exposed to cattle by the missionaries who noted a Seminole affinity for cattle. The Seminoles began establishing their own herds, some of substantial size. However, these herds dwindled during the Seminole wars of the mid-1800's. Remnants of the Seminole tribe relocated in the unsettled lands of southern Florida, but their original cattle herds were gone.

Today the Seminole herds are prospering and growing on ranching operations located on the Brighton and Big Cypress Reservations. The 36,000 acre Brighton Reservation is located approximately 20 miles southwest of Okeechobee. Cabbage palm hammocks are scattered throughout the sweet (lesser acid) flatwoods range lands where bluestems and wiregrass dominate. Little blue maidencane sloughs and maidencane freshwater marshes serve as natural drainage ways and pro-

vide the most nutritious native forages. The 50,000 acre Big Cypress Reservation is located approximately 40 miles southeast of Immokalee. As indicated by the name, cypress is the dominant tree that is located in domes and strands throughout the area. The eastern portion of Big Cypress is dominated by sawgrass, the characteristic sedge of the Everglades. As on the Brighton Reservation, littleblue maidencane sloughs and maidencane marshes drain the flatwoods sites.

Seminole ranching enterprises began rebuilding in 1936 when the United States Government shipped 500 head of drought relief Hereford cattle from Arizona to the Seminole Indian Agency. Some cattle died en route due to the severe drought in the West and the long trip by rail. Others died on the overland drive to the Brighton Reservation just north of Lake Okeechobee. Many local stockmen speculated that the Hereford cattle, a breed more accustomed to a temperate climate, would not survive. Natural selection took its toll, but those that survived were very hardy and became very good brood stock.

Florida operated under an open range policy until the fence law of 1949. Therefore, fencing of the Reservations' open range was a necessity to keep their herds from mixing with herds of neighboring ranches.

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Cabbage palm hammock and south Florida slash pine on a "sweet" flatwoods site. Shrubs in foreground are saw palmetto.

By 1940 the cattle operation was well established and an additional group of 2-year-old heifers was purchased from the San Carlos Apache Reservation in Arizona. Originally the herds were bred to Hereford and Brahman bulls, but in 1961, it was decided to use just Hereford bulls.

The conversion of native range land to more productive, tame grass pasture became imperative to accommodate the expanding herds in the early 1950's. The Seminole Tribe entered into agreement with truck farmers to enhance the



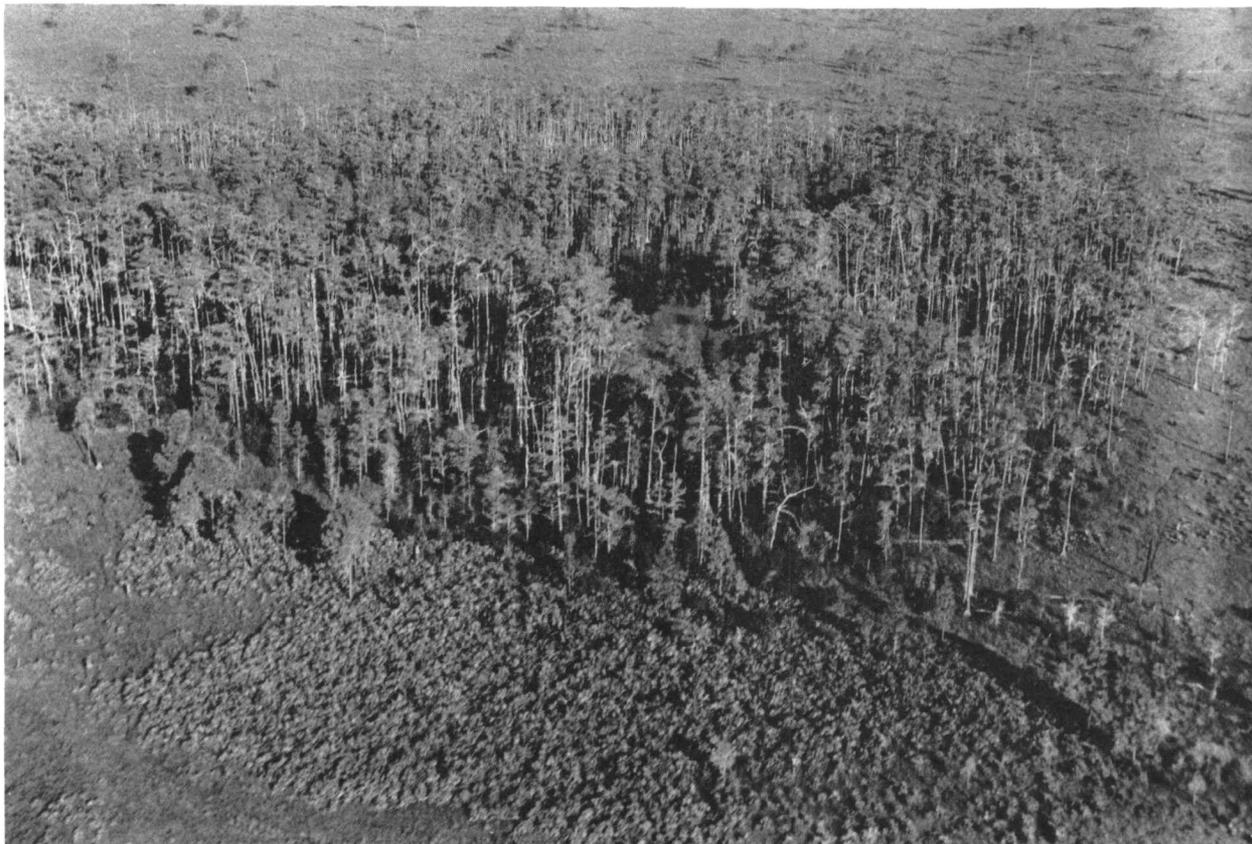
Native forages in a freshwater marsh surrounded by slash pine flatwoods.

economic feasibility of these land conversions. Farmers cleared and drained the land for two years of vegetable production. A pasture grass, commonly bahiagrass or pangolagrass, was planted after the final vegetable harvest.

In 1954 the Tribal herds were dispersed into individual ownership on a loan contract from the Tribe. Initially, 55 individuals on the Brighton Reservation were each issued 50 head. Since fewer cattle were available on the Big Cypress reservation, 33 individuals were each issued 30 head. These cattle programs were organized in 1954 and incorporated under a State Charter in 1959 into two cattlemen associations known as the Brighton Indian and Big Cypress Indian



Tribal herd of young Black Angus and Beefmaster bulls on a tame grass pasture.



An oblique, aerial photograph of a cypress pond, or dome. Note standing water in center of dome.

Cattlemen's Association. Officers are elected by Association members to transact all business necessary for operations in accordance with the Constitution and By-Laws of the Association. Self-imposed fees provide financing of various projects.

The two Associations initiated a herd improvement program in 1965 with assistance of two animal geneticists, Dr. Joe Crockett, of the Belle Glade Agricultural Research and Education Center, and Dr. Marvin Koger, of the Department of Animal Science, University of Florida. Their major objective was to establish a Tribal Bull Program that would supply quality sires, adapted to the subtropical environment, to the individual herds of the reservations. Sales of excess bulls have gained notoriety in recent years, a testimony to their accomplishments. Originally, all Hereford bulls were used at Brighton and all Angus bulls at Big Cypress. Although portions of these lines are still maintained today, Brangus and Beef-master breeds are becoming more predominant.

The Seminole Tribe has developed a reputation for producing some of the best feeder calves in the United States. Many buyers are drawn to the sales, and top dollar is received by pooling calves from all the individual herds into large uniform lots. The Seminole Tribe also is using recently developed video sales techniques to enhance marketing.

The goal of the Seminole Tribe is to increase production. The most suitable lands have already been converted to tame pasture. Therefore, management must be intensified to

increase forage production and utilization on both pastureland and the remaining rangeland. Increased production will be achieved by matching forage grasses to soils, upgrading the Reservations' water control systems, and improving grazing management. The tribe is presently experimenting with rapid rotation, short duration grazing systems on its tribal cattle projects. Remnant rangelands are becoming more important for the additional forage they can provide in winter.

A large tract of rangeland existing on the Big Cypress Reservation remains undeveloped. The tribe wishes to leave this tract intact for wildlife habitat, forestry, and native range grazing to insure a remnant of their heritage. New cattle owners will start on the native range like their forefathers. Several owners will pool their herds into one herd and rotate among several pastures. These new stockmen will move to tame grass pasture leases as openings occur.

The present cattle program has been the most successful agricultural endeavor of the Seminole Tribe. Ingenuity, cooperation, and hard work have produced this success. A commitment to intensive but practical management of their resources will insure success of the Seminole agricultural operations. ●

